

THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION FOUNDATION

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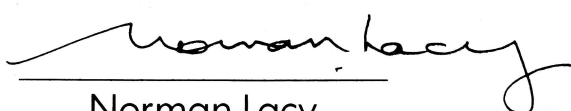
## Message from the Ministerial Convenors for the booklet.

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Children view a great deal of television. That alone makes it an important factor in their growth and development. Those who care about children must care about what kind of television is available for children to watch. It is this concern that led to the decision by the Australian Education Council, the Ministers of Education representing Commonwealth and State Governments, to support the establishment of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

The Foundation is conceived as an organisation which will complement the work of those presently engaged in the production of television programs for children, and it is designed to harness the scarce talents and resources available in Australia. If the Foundation is successful, children will have the opportunity to choose from a wide range of quality programs.

This publication has been prepared to inform readers of the aims, structure and operations of the proposed Australian Children's Television Foundation. As Ministerial Convenors of the Steering Committee of the Foundation, we commend this booklet to you.



Norman Lacy  
Minister for the Arts  
(Victoria)



Paul Landa  
Minister for Education  
(New South Wales)

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## An Australian Children's Television Foundation...

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At a meeting of the Commonwealth and State Ministers with responsibility for the Arts in Canberra on February 13, 1980, it was agreed unanimously that the Ministers for Arts and Education proceed to set up a Children's Television Foundation to improve the quality of television programs for young people.

At a further meeting of the Australian Education Council in Hobart on February 19, 1981, the Ministers of Education, representing the Federal and State Governments, resolved to support the establishment of an Australian Children's Television Foundation.

A Steering Committee has been established with a view to the creation of the Foundation. The Steering Committee is to report to the Victorian Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Norman Lacy, and the N.S.W. Minister of Education, the Hon. Paul Landa.

The Ministerial Convenors have appointed two consultants to assist with the implementation of the proposal, Dr. Patricia Edgar (Victoria), and Mr. Frank Meaney (NSW). The consultants, known as Task Force Directors, will assist a Steering Committee, which has nationwide representation.

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## The Ministers who attended the two meetings are as follows:

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Arts.

Victoria:

The Hon. Norman Lacy, M.P.

New South Wales:

The Hon. D.P. Landa, LL.B., M.L.C.

representing The Hon. Neville Wran,

Education.

Victoria:

The Hon. A.J. Hunt, M.L.C.

The Hon. Norman Lacy, M.P.

New South Wales:

The Hon. D.P. Landa, LL.B., M.L.C.

Q.C., M.P., Premier.  
South Australia:  
The Hon. Murray Hill, M.L.C.  
Tasmania:  
The Hon. Terry Aulich, M.H.A.  
Western Australia:  
The Hon. W.L. Grayden, M.P.  
Northern Territory:  
The Hon. Marshall Peron, M.P.  
Queensland:  
The Hon. J.A. Elliott, M.P.  
Federal:  
The Hon. R.J. Ellicott, Q.C., M.P.

South Australia:  
The Hon. H. Allison, M.P.  
Tasmania:  
The Hon. H.N. Holgate, M.H.A.  
Western Australia:  
The Hon. W.L. Grayden, M.L.A.  
Northern Territory:  
Mr. S. Saville, representing  
The Hon. J.M. Robertson, M.P.  
Queensland:  
The Hon. W.A.M. Gunn, M.P.  
Federal:  
The Hon. W.C. Fife, M.P.

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Steering Committee of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

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Steering Committee of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

Chairman:

Ken Watts, Chairman, Australian Film Commission

Members:

Victoria:

Phillip Adams, Film Producer, Media Commentator

New South Wales:

Anne Gorman, Executive Director, Planning, Research & Evaluation,  
Department of Youth and Community Affairs

South Australia:

John Morris, Director, South Australian Film Corporation

Tasmania:

Patricia Braithwaite, Senior Education Assistant,  
Education Department (Curriculum Branch)

Western Australia:

Sir James Cruthers, former Chairman/Managing Director, TVW-7

Northern Territory:

Queensland:

Commonwealth:

E.S. Rolfe, Assistant Secretary, Education Planning Group,  
Department of Education

Task Force Directors:

Patricia Edgar, Victoria

Frank Meaney, New South Wales

Consultants:

John McRae, Shotton Productions Pty. Ltd.

Ian Fairweather, Interim Director, Broadcasting Information Office.

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6th Floor, 186 Exhibition St. Melbourne, Victoria. 3000.

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## The Television Needs of Children...

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Children have special needs as television viewers and require special treatment. Legislative or regulatory action alone will not achieve improvements in children's television. A substantial improvement in the quality and quantity of children's television programming requires the spending of large amounts of money. No significant improvement in the quality of children's television programs will be achieved unless a massive effort is made by governments, networks and other funding sources to co-operate in meeting this challenge.

To support improvements in the quality and quantity of children's television is to recognise that children, the nation's most important yet vulnerable resource, need and deserve subsidising.

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### The Problem.

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The belief that children have special needs as television viewers and require special treatment has been stated by television executives, government agencies and various enquiries over the past twenty-five years of television in Australia. This belief has yet to be reflected in the overall quality of children's programming.

The failure to achieve satisfactory results has been due partly to the absence of concerted and continued action by networks and advertisers, partly to a paucity of leadership on this issue by governments, and partly to there being insufficient public action. The main factor, however, has been that no-one has acknowledged that a substantial improvement in the quality and availability of children's programs requires the spending of large amounts of money.

Public enquiries such as that conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal into self-regulation, the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, and the licence renewal enquiries have demonstrated that there is a growing public concern about children's television.

Demands for regulatory action have resulted in the establishment of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's Children's Program Committee. The Committee is charged with the responsibility... to formulate guidelines for programs to be televised during periods, as determined by the Tribunal, when only material specifically designed for children may be presented ('C' classified time zone).

The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal required, from July 1980, that five hours a week of 'C' rated material (i.e., programs classified by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's Children's Program Committee as designed for children aged 6-13 years) be screened between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. on each station. For those capital cities with three commercial stations, 15 hours per week, or 780 hours per year, of 'C' material are needed to comply with this requirement.

Children's drama is not cheaper to make than adult drama, but the revenue that realistically can be expected from it is considerably less. Good quality drama programs cost at least \$84,000 per hour to produce. Other



programs such as magazines cost about \$17,000 per hour. On a 50/50 mix, the average production cost per hour of Australian made material would be \$50,000 per hour.

Complementary to this, there is children's material available from overseas countries which has never been seen on Australian screens. Some of this can be purchased for as little as \$4,000 per hour. It would cost the Australian networks ten times more than they currently spend to purchase high quality overseas programs, and one hundred times more to produce their own programs to an equivalent standard.

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### Tackling the Problem...

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The most cost-effective way of tackling the problem, and the only way likely to achieve the required breakthrough, is to set up a new organisation: an independent body with a national identity, owing allegiance to no commercial interest, yet capable of earning the respect of all parties because of its constructive approach. A central authority with the single aim of promoting the production and transmission of quality children's television would have advantages over existing State and Commonwealth bodies each with different aims:

- It would be more efficient in the co-ordination of marketing activities.
  - It could concentrate on developing expertise in the area of children's programming not currently available at State level, with subsequent cost effectiveness advantages.
  - It would be better placed to link research with production;
- and
- It would be better placed to attract financial support from the private sector.

This organisation should not be a production house. It should work exclusively through existing production houses and producers, including the appropriate State bodies and the television stations, supplying finance for worthwhile projects that are brought to it as well as commissioning the making of projects it has initiated.

In the field of the needs and responses of child audiences there are organisations and individuals struggling to carry out research, and others whose desire to do so has been thwarted by the lack of money. This research potential should be co-ordinated, encouraged and sponsored by a national body which also should undertake its own projects where no appropriate outside organisation exists.

Taking into account the present state of the industry, a major effort will have to be made to develop sufficient writers, directors and producers with motivation, experience and expertise in children's program production. Australia has the actors and production crews which could be readily deployed for children's programming. The deficiency in the other areas could be overcome by studentships, overseas exchange programs and workshops involving experts from other countries.

Television stations generally program in every time-slot what they believe to be the most popular material they can obtain consistent with their current purchasing policies. Television executives have expressed a desire to improve the quality of children's programming. If it is possible to deliver to the stations high quality and entertaining programs at prices they can afford, there is every reason to believe they will be welcomed. This means that, under current conditions, the prices charged for the programs will have to be only a fraction of their costs.

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#### Functions of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

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(a) Encourage the development, production and transmission of children's television programs of quality.

It is noted that:

- Although the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal requires stations to cater for pre-school children, no criteria for quality control have been stipulated.
- The 6-12 year olds are catered for by the Tribunal's 'C' classification and a pattern of programming is emerging. Stations are producing magazine programs but so far there is little evidence that a range of programs, including drama will be produced.
- At present there is virtually no programming for 13-15 year olds, yet this is the age of awakening consciousness of the desire for independence, of sexual curiosity and of the continuing development of moral and ethical values.

To achieve this objective the Foundation would need to:

- Liaise with community organisations including educational institutions, artistic associations, craft guilds, performing groups etc.
- Liaise with the Australian Film and Television School, State Film Corporations, the Australian Film Commission and private production houses.
- Liaise with publishers of children's and educational books including ethnic material.
- Liaise with commercial stations and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.
- Invest in programs developed by television stations.
- Co-produce or invest in programs developed by independent producers.
- Develop scripts and commission their production by independent production companies or television stations.
- Achieve pre-sales of Australian rights and, where possible, investment against foreign sales from local television stations.
- Hold discussions with expert bodies (including Government organisations) and people, to obtain ideas for programs to meet the needs of children and adolescents including those with special problems.
- Hold discussions with groups and individuals with special knowledge of local and ethnic communities and their children's needs.
- Work with television stations to help promote audience awareness of quality children's programs.

(b) Facilitate training activities including the specialised training of writers, directors and producers.

- Organise workshops and seminars.
- Arrange discussions and expert advice for those with talent.
- Facilitate and/or arrange awards and contests.
- Facilitate industry and artistic contacts, in Australia and overseas for those involved in children's productions.
- Facilitate travel overseas for development purposes, especially of writers, directors and producers.
- Arrange visits to Australia of children's television experts.

(c) Encourage, sponsor and conduct research into all areas relevant to children's television.

There is a dearth of research information on the reaction of Australian children to children's programs and to programming generally. With some exceptions, international research is also limited. In the battle to obtain money and personnel for production, research has understandably come a poor second.

Adult programs are developed by trial-and-error and much experience of audience acceptance is gained. With the level of financial resources which is at stake, a great deal of research and consultation work needs to take place before audiences are selected, goals established and program commitments made. There needs to be research on development and program evaluation as well as audience research. Useful research might include:

(i) Pre-Production:

- Study of program components to help identify elements enjoyed by children.
- Study of the goals (including where appropriate the educational goals) of programs.
- Study of reactions of children to current programs:
  - popular with children
  - designed for children
  - from overseas.

(ii) In Progress:

Evaluation of prototype segments of film, tapes, scripts and storyboards. In this way material can be dropped, modified and added to, compatibility of different elements tested, features to be emulated, identified, revised or avoided. (SESAME STREET, THE ELECTRIC COMPANY and 321 CONTACT have all been developed in this way by the Children's Television Workshop in New York.)

(iii) Program impact and audience studies:

Studies aimed at providing generalisations, e.g., comparing different groups by self esteem, viewing patterns, age, sex, metropolitan-country residence, ethnic origin/language, family situation, socio-economic level. Enjoyment but also attainment.

(iv) Other Research:

Special projects might include:

- The role of television in the lives of disadvantaged and ethnic children.



- The economic needs of children's programming in Australia and sources of future funding.
- The impact of advertising on children's values.
- The monitoring of worldwide trends in children's television.
- The gathering and collating of information on programs produced and televised from industry bodies, production companies, commercial and government research organisations and pressure groups.

(d) Promote Mass Media Education.

Mass media education is not a matter of peripheral concern in the development of the media nor is it the concern of educationists only. Rather, it goes to the heart of the problem of improving, even maintaining, the quality of programming, and increasing discrimination in viewers. Most importantly, it relates to the need for children to understand and be selective in what they see, hear and read, and to develop their creativity. Most people never learn to understand even the basic processes by which programs go to air, let alone the specific skills necessary to translate ideas into programming.

In view of the role of the Children's Television Foundation in catering for the needs of children and the need to develop creative resources, there is a strong argument for involvement in stimulating and helping mass media education at the same time.

It is necessary to recognise that much has already been done to develop media education in individual states. In some cases, curriculum guidelines in media studies have been written, and courses in both primary and secondary schools are in various stages of implementation. However, it cannot be assumed from these initiatives that the need for media education in all schools is therefore being met. The level of penetration into schools is still extremely low; even in those schools where courses in media studies are offered, only a small percentage of students actually participate in such courses. The reasons are numerous: the lack of status of media education, compared with more traditional core subject areas, the lack of teacher education in media studies, and perhaps most importantly, the lack of resources.

The Children's Television Foundation should support media education at a national level by consulting with education planners, school principals and parent organisations in order to:

- Encourage the growth of mass media courses (combining practice and theory) in schools.
- Facilitate and encourage the production of quality film and videotaped material in schools.
- Facilitate the flow of information and personal contacts between schools, school systems and the media industries.

The Children's Television Foundation should liaise with other organisations engaged in work related to this activity and should assist their activities rather than duplicate work already being done. One such organisation would be the Australian Council for Children's Film and Television.

- (e) Collect and disseminate information on all facets of television for Children.
- Establish a data base of research findings and a resources centre on children's television.
  - Make available information about the industry, programming and research.
  - Publish and distribute newsletters to members and others.
  - Provide facilities, arrange seminars.
  - Provide speakers on children's television for relevant gatherings.
  - Publish from time to time, commentaries on the developments in children's television programs.
- (f) Identify quality overseas programs and introduce them to the Australian television stations.
- Contact overseas production houses and stations.
  - Contact bodies such as the Canadian Children's Broadcast Institute; Ontario Educational Communications Authority; Action for Children's Television, U.S.A.; The Independent Broadcasting Authority's Children's Committee; and the European Broadcasting Union Children's Committee.
  - Contact regulatory bodies overseas.
  - Determine sources of quality children's programs and whether or not Agencies exist here.
  - Liaise with people who acquire children's programs in Australia to obtain information on their problems and offer assistance.
- (g) Market or arrange for the marketing overseas, of programs in which the Foundation has a financial interest.
- Good children's television material, providing it has universal appeal, is highly marketable throughout the world. Because of the limited price all countries can afford to pay, there is little chance of achieving high profitability in this area but something approaching recoupment of production costs of some programs is a realistic expectation.
  - Overseas agents will be appointed to handle world sales.
  - The Foundation should aim to retain the overseas marketing rights, to any program in which it is a deficit financier.

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## History of the Proposal for an Australian Children's Television Foundation

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### (I) The Australian Broadcasting Control Board

The concept of an independent children's authority originated, at an official level, with the Children's Television Advisory Committee to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB). The Committee, in its Interim Report of 26th June, 1972, suggested:

"That the Commonwealth Government should consider means of encouraging the production of suitable programs for example, by offering grants, subsidies, or tax concessions as financial assistance to those programs.

Perhaps it should also consider ways in which to support the establishment of an independent foundation to produce film and television programs especially designed for children".

The Committee also stressed the need for the provision of adequate training for children's program production personnel and for the encouragement of:

"many organisations which work to develop the creative, critical and intellectual resources of children (which is likely to contribute to a growing maturity of judgement and responsiveness to good quality children's television programs").

The proposal for a Children's Television Foundation was reiterated by the Committee in its Final Report of 28th February, 1973. Funding of the Foundation was proposed to be by a levy on the gross revenue of stations. Other measures were proposed to improve the quality of programs seeking accreditation for the school-age quota (i.e., the ABCB minimum school-age requirement imposed on stations), but the Committee saw the institution of an independent foundation as the ultimate response if other measures failed to improve the quality of children's programs.

Overall the Committee in its Final Report was critical of the lack of clear improvement in children's programming since the inception of the ABCB's quota requirement.

Following this Report, the proposal to set up a Foundation was examined informally by a voluntary organisation, the Council for Children's Film and Television, and Officers of the ABCB. It did not, however, come to fruition.

Another ad hoc advisory committee, the Advisory Committee on Program Standards, set up in September 1975 by the ABCB to undertake a general review of the television and radio standards, had this to say in its Report on February 1976:

"The Board has attempted to encourage stations... by establishing quotas and the points system for Australian Content. However, these attempts have not been effective in improving children's programs".

The Committee did not specifically propose a Children's Television Foundation, but was in favour of Government subsidy through the Australian Film Commission and State Film Authorities. It did, however, cite the example of the Children's Television Workshop in the United States, the producer of *SESAME STREET*, which receives heavy government and institutional subsidies.

One of the last proposals put forward by the ABCB prior to its abolition and replacement in late 1976 was the use of licence fees paid by stations to fund a Children's Program Unit.

## (II) The Australian Broadcasting Tribunal

From late March to early June 1977, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT), set up to replace the ABCB, conducted an Australia-wide enquiry into program standards and their administration. In its Report, "Self-Regulation for Broadcasters", July 1977, made on the basis of 550 written submissions, 292 witnesses, and internal investigations, the ABT reiterated the criticisms of children's television by the ABCB's Advisory Committee on Program Standards.

Major consumer groups concerned with the standard of children's programs such as ACTAC and the Australian Council for Children's Film and



Television were also, in evidence to the ABT, highly critical of station programming. Similar criticisms were made at the first public licence renewal hearings conducted by the ABT in Adelaide in October 1978, Sydney in March 1979, and Melbourne in May 1979. A number of public submissions favoured the setting up of an independent foundation to produce quality programs.

### (III) The Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts

Recent public support for the setting up of an independent foundation has resulted from the work of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts. The Committee's report, "Children and Television", based on a 1978 enquiry into the impact of television on the development and learning behaviour of children favoured the establishment of a Children's Television Program Production Unit.

A number of witnesses who appeared before the Senate enquiry urged the setting up of an independent foundation, and the Committee accepted this as the most likely option to succeed in improving children's programs.

It stated:

"We believe that children's television is a crucial social issue and that if we are genuinely concerned to protect the interests of the child viewing audience from possible harmful effects and to see to it that the medium is used to enrich and enlighten their lives, then the responsibility for producing programs for children should be removed from the arena of industry economics."

The Senate Standing Committee put forward the proposal for this Authority in the context of a moratorium period during which its special programs would be shown. It was proposed that initial funding would come from the Government. It was felt, however, that in the long term such a body would attract financial support from Australian business interests.

The Standing Committee held another round of hearings in March 1981 to make a further report to the Government on the current state of children's television.

### (IV) The Australian Children's Television Foundation Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was established early in 1979 with a grant of \$2,500 from the New South Wales Government. This grant was later matched by the Victorian Government. The Committee's purpose was to gain support for a Foundation which would be incorporated as a national association. The Committee had reached the point of incorporation proceedings when the Australian Education Council established a Working Group. It therefore halted its work but remains an active Committee, interested in the Foundation.

### (V) The Commonwealth Government

In May 1980, the Minister for Post and Telecommunications, Mr. Staley, made a statement in Parliament on the Government's general reaction to the recommendations of the Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts.

Mr. Staley said:

"There is no question of the need for more information on the effects of

television on children in the Australian context. Action resulting from the Senate Report and Tribunal activities should provide this information. Let me assure the Senate that the Government will not hesitate to endorse additional measures should further information reveal that action presently being implemented is not effective."

#### (VI) The Victorian Government

In June 1980, the Hon. Norman Lacy MP, Assistant Minister of Education (Victoria), outlined to the Australian Education Council the need for a Government subsidised Australian Children's Television Foundation. He stressed the role Commonwealth and State Governments should play in such a Foundation and gained support in principle from all Governments for the concepts he outlined.

#### (VII) The Australian Education Council

As a result the AEC established a Working Group to report within three months on the feasibility of establishing an Australian Children's Television Foundation. That Working Group's Report recommended that such a Foundation should be set up.

Subsequently, on February 13, 1981 at the Conference of Commonwealth/State Ministers with responsibilities in the Arts and Cultural matters, all Ministers supported the recommendations in the AEC report relating to the establishment of a Foundation. On February 19, the Australian Education Council—comprising State, Territory, and Commonwealth Ministers for Education—also agreed to support the establishment of an Australian Children's Television Foundation, and to set up a Steering Committee with a view to creating the Foundation. Both Victoria and New South Wales committed funds to support the Steering Committee and a Task Force. These interim bodies have the responsibility for drawing up a budget and staffing proposal for submission to all Governments. If Governments approve the proposal and make financial commitments, the Australian Children's Television Foundation will be established in the coming financial year.

The Australian Children's Television Foundation is to be set up as a Company Limited by Guarantee subject to the approval of Governments. The Foundation needs the commitment of funds from Governments in order to be established. Your interest and support is necessary for the success of the Foundation.